



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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FLOOR STATEMENT OF REP. FLOYD SPENCE

CHAIRMAN, HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON H.R. 1569

A BILL PROHIBITING USE OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FUNDS

FOR U.S. GROUND FORCES IN YUGOSLAVIA

April 28, 1999

Since the initial 1995 deployment of U.S. ground troops to Bosnia, I have opposed the use of ground forces in the Balkans, and I continue to do so today.

First and foremost, my opposition is based on the recognition that our military forces have been reduced so dramatically over the past decade that an enlarged, open-ended commitment in the Balkans will unquestionably jeopardize our ability to protect U.S. interests in other critical regions of the world where the threat is serious and imminent. Prior to the beginning of Operation "Allied Force," the Joint Chiefs of Staff had assessed the ability of U.S. armed forces to execute our own national military strategy as entailing "moderate to high risk." So the risk has only gotten worse over the past several months as we have poured scarce military resources and assets into the Balkans. Just today I read an article in *Jane's Defense Weekly* indicating that the Joint Chiefs are on the verge of changing their assessment of this risk from "high" to "very high." As General Shelton, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and every theater commander-in-chief have explained, "risk" in this context means longer wars and a higher number of casualties.

Based on planning efforts last fall, defeating the Serb army on the ground in Yugoslavia would require a NATO force of 200,000 ground troops or more. While NATO plans have not specified what percentage of such a force would be Americans, precedent tells me that such a NATO force would include tens of thousands of U.S. ground troops- at least several divisions' worth.

The implications of U.S. ground troops serving even as peacekeepers or as part of an international occupation force would have serious consequences for our broader global interests. Administration policy-makers are now discussing a possible NATO occupation force in Kosovo that would be roughly the same size as the force initially deployed to Bosnia. That force included 60,000 NATO troops, about 20,000 of which were American. This size American ground contingent would, directly or indirectly, involve much of the active

Army. Rotating such a large force through Kosovo, with no near-term prospect of withdrawal, combined with the ongoing deployments in Bosnia, would make it all but impossible for the Army to play its essential role in fighting and winning two major regional conflicts in places like Korea and the Persian Gulf- in other words, to be able to execute the national military strategy.

Tying down a large U.S. ground force in the Balkans will cause our friends - and our enemies - to legitimately question our ability to protect and promote our interests and to remain a force for stability in other critical regions. How will Saddam Hussein gauge our ability to defend Kuwait if much of our Army is stuck in the Balkans? Will we be able to rapidly reinforce Korea in the event of an attack by the North? Would we be able to effectively react to an escalating crisis or conflict in the Taiwan Strait? The answers to these questions are far from reassuring, and should concern us all.

In anticipation of the inevitable and oversimplified response that we surely cannot abandon our commitment to NATO, let me just say that I am not suggesting that the United States would walk away from its responsibilities or should not play a critical role in any NATO combined air and ground campaign if the alliance heads down this controversial path.

While I remain strongly opposed to the commitment of U.S. ground troops in the Balkans, we should not lose sight of the reality that the United States is leading the air war and would continue to do so in the event of a ground campaign. In addition, the United States is currently providing the vast majority of the operation's strategic lift, communications, logistics and intelligence support. Is this shirking our responsibilities to NATO? Can anyone honestly say we are failing to do our fair share? I do not think so.

Without these special American capabilities, a NATO ground campaign in the Balkans is almost inconceivable, and would certainly be a much riskier operation. We simply cannot afford to ignore our interests and the growing threats around the world by allowing ourselves to fall into the trap set by our allies, as happened in Bosnia, that NATO military operations cannot succeed and the alliance will fall apart unless U.S. ground troops are leading the way. If we continue to view the Balkans in isolation from the rest of what is becoming an increasingly dangerous world, we do so at our own peril.

Mr. Speaker, there's an old adage that says, "When you're in a hole, stop digging." We've already dug ourselves a big hole in Bosnia and we ought to think twice before we dig that hole deeper in Kosovo. Unless some balance is restored between the nation's diplomatic and foreign policy commitments and the ability of U.S. armed forces to underwrite them, history is likely to look back on the post-Cold War world "peace dividend" as resulting in a more dangerous world in which America's credibility and resolve were put to the test with alarming frequency.

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